

Goliad massacre

The **Goliad Massacre** was an execution of Republic of Texas soldiers and their commander, James Fannin, by Mexico, reluctantly carried out by General Jose de Urrea.

Background

The Mexican Army was led by Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who had sent General José Urrea marching into Texas from Matamoros, making his way north by following the coast of Texas. On March 19, he had quickly advanced and surrounded the 300 men in the Texian Army on the open prairie, near La Bahia (Goliad). A two day Battle of Coleto ensued with the Texians holding their own on the first day. However, the Mexicans would receive overwhelming reinforcements and heavy artillery. Due to their critical predicament, Texan Colonel James Fannin and his staff had voted to surrender the Texian forces on the 20th. Led to believe that they would be released into the United States, they returned to their former fort in Goliad, now being their prison.^[1]

Albert Clinton Horton and company had been acting as the advance and rear guards for Fannin's company. Surprised by an overwhelming Mexican force, they were chased off and escaped, however 18 of the group were captured and marched back to Goliad.^[2]

On February 27, 1836, Urrea's advance patrol surprised Frank W. Johnson and about 34 men initiating the Battle of San Patricio, killing about 10 and taking 18 prisoners. Johnson and five Texians were captured but managed to escape and rejoin James Fannin's command at Goliad.

March 2, at the Battle of Agua Dulce, James Grant was killed, as were 11 other men under his command.^[3] Six Texians were taken prisoners and were marched to prison in Matamoros. Six Texians escaped, five were recaptured and marched to Goliad.

Amon B. King and a group of men had been executed on March 16 in Refugio, but about 15-18 prisoners were marched to Goliad, to serve as blacksmiths or mechanics.

75 soldiers of William Parsons Miller and the Nashville Battalion had been captured on the 20th and marched in on the 23rd. Being detained separately from the other prisoners, since they had surrendered without weaponry.

On March 22, William Ward and the Georgia Battalion (80 men plus Ward), surrendered after escaping from the Battle of Refugio. About 26 men were retained at Victoria as laborers, but 55 prisoners were marched into Goliad, on March 25th.^[4]

Massacre

The Mexicans took the Texans back to Goliad, where they were held as prisoners at Fort Defiance (Presidio La Bahia). The Texans thought they would likely be set free in a few weeks. General Urrea departed Goliad, leaving command to Colonel Nicolas de la Shelton. Urrea wrote to Santa Anna to ask for clemency for the Texans. Urrea wrote in his diary that he "...wished to elude these orders as far as possible without compromising my personal responsibility." On March 26, 1836, 19:00, Santa Anna ordered Portilla to execute the prisoners.^[1]

The next day, Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836, Colonel Portilla had the 303 Texians marched out of Fort Defiance into three columns on the Bexar Road, San Patricio Road, and the Victoria Road, between two rows of Mexican soldiers; they were shot point-blank, and any survivors were clubbed and knifed to death.^[1]

Forty Texians were unable to walk. Thirty nine were killed inside the fort, under the direction of Captain Carolino Huerta of the Tres Villas battalion, with Colonel Garay saving one. Colonel Fannin was the last to be executed, after seeing his men executed. Age 32, he was taken by Mexican soldiers to the courtyard in front of the chapel, blindfolded, and seated in a chair (due to his leg wound from the battle). He made three requests: he asked for his personal possessions to be sent to his family, to be shot in his heart and not his face, and to be given a Christian

burial. The soldiers took his belongings, shot his face, and burned Fannin's body along with the other Texans who died that day.^[5]

The entire Texian force was killed except for twenty-eight men who feigned death and escaped. Among these was Herman Ehrenberg, who later wrote an account of the massacre.

Fortunately, due to the intervention of the "Angel of Goliad", (Francita Alavez), and the courageous effort of Colonel Francisco Garay, twenty more men were held and spared as doctors, interpreters, or workers.^[6]

Also spared were the 75 soldiers of William Parsons Miller and the Nashville Battalion, who had been captured and had surrendered without weapons. The men were later marched to Matamoros.^[7]

Spared men were given white arm bands, while wearing them, they could walk about freely. They were advised not to take off the arm band or they might be shot, since the Mexican troops were hunting for those that had escaped from Coleta, Victoria and the massacre itself.

Aftermath

After the executions the Texian's bodies were piled and burned. Their charred remains were left in the open, unburied and exposed to vultures, and coyotes. About a month later, word reached La Bahia(Goliad) that General Santa Anna had been defeated and surrendered. The Mexican soldiers at La Bahia returned to the funeral pyres and gathered up any visible remains of the Texians and then re-burned any evidence of the bodies.

The massive number of Texian casualties throughout the Goliad Campaign and the "take-no-prisoners" attitude of the Mexican army led to Goliad being called a "Massacre" by Texas-American forces and fueled the frenzy of the Runaway Scrape.

References

- [1] Hardin (1994), pg. 173
- [2] Matthew Ellenberger, "HORTON, ALBERT CLINTON," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fho62>), accessed June 09, 2011. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- [3] O'Connor (1966), pp. 147–148.
- [4] Castaneda (1970), p. 19.
- [5] Hardin (1994), pg. 174
- [6] Hardin (1994), pg. 237
- [7] Craig H. Roell, "MILLER, WILLIAM PARSONS," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fmi30>), accessed April 03, 2011. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

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